DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 477 366 TM 034 984

AUTHOR	Lumby, Jacky
TITLE	Accountability in Further Education: The Impact of UK Government Policy.
PUB DATE	2003-04-00
NOTE	11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Chicago, IL, April 21-25, 2003).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Accountability; *Educational Change; Foreign Countries; *Government Role; *Postsecondary Education; *Public Policy; *Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS	Further Education Unit (England); *Sixth Form; *United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

In 1993 the government of the United Kingdom introduced a raft of measures designed to improve practice in postcompulsory, nonadvanced education. A survey of postcompulsory institutions suggests that the same policies have led to different outcomes in the two main types of institution: general further education colleges and sixth form colleges. Questionnaires were completed by representatives of 61 sixth form colleges, 489 secondary schools, and 60 general further education colleges in 2 regions of England. The difference in impact relates to a range of factors, including the socioeconomic background of students, the size of institution, and the degree of market security. The criticism that policy changes, and specifically a strengthened accountability culture, have distracted college leaders at all levels from improving learning is suggested to be an over simplistic analysis of the interplay of factors. (Contains 2 figures and 22 references.) (Author/SLD)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original document.

ED 477 366

UNIVERSITY OF
LINCOLN

Accountability in further education: the impact of UK government policy

Jacky Lumby

Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association 2003 Annual Meeting, Chicago, 21st -25th April, 2003.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. Lumby

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Contact details:

Professor Jacky Lumby
International Institute for Educational Leadership
University of Lincoln,
Brayford Pool
Lincoln,
LN6 7TS.

Telephone: 01522 886190

Facsimile: 01522 886023

Email: jlumby@lincoln.ac.uk

TM034984

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Accountability in further education: the impact of UK government policy

Abstract
In 1993 the UK government introduced a raft of measures designed to improve practice in post-compulsory non-advanced education. A survey of post-compulsory institutions suggests that the same policies have led to different outcomes in the two main types of institution. The difference in the impact relates to a range of factors, including the socioeconomic background of students, the size of institution and the degree of market security. The criticism that policy changes and specifically a strengthened accountability culture have distracted college leaders at all levels from improving learning is suggested to be an over simplistic analysis of the interplay of factors.

The context
Further education colleges in England cater for approximately 4.15 million students (LSC, 2002) from 16 years of age upwards to 80 and beyond. They offer largely vocational education and training at further and higher levels. Every town of any size has one and cities may have several. In 1993 the UK government incorporated the 415 colleges which comprised the sector in England, replacing the previous administrative control of the Local Education Authorities with a newly constituted governing board for each college, reshaped to include a majority of members from business and industry. Overall responsibility for funding the sector and for assuring its quality were placed with a quasi non governmental organisation (QUANGO), the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC), the Board of which was appointed by national government. At a stroke the oversight of local democratically elected councillors was replaced with non elected appointments. The intention was clearly to make colleges more accountable to central government and to local business and industry.

The change followed a history of criticism of the sector. The 1980's and 1990's saw repeated attacks on the achievement of colleges, both in attracting an appropriate range of students and then in providing an appropriate quality of education and training (DES, 1991; Edwards, 1993; Employment Department Group, 1993; Young, 1993). To address a sector perceived as failing its largely working class market, legislation introduced a range of new measures to open colleges to market forces and to subject them to a series of control and accountability measures. Punitive funding was introduced, not only reducing the funds available in real terms but also tightly linking funding to student retention and achievement. An inspection system was introduced which publishes the results of scrutiny of each college's teaching, leadership and management and examination results. Performance indicators were introduced and each college's success or otherwise against each of the criteria are published annually. Such measures were designed to open the sector to competition, to free each College Board to fashion its own strategy and to make transparent each college's record in attracting, educating/training and helping students to succeed.

The policy changes and their results have not stemmed the tide of criticism. The White Paper 'Learning to Succeed' (DfEE, 1999) reprised the same theme:

> The system fails a significant section of the community.... There are too many providers where quality is not up to scratch.... (There are) fundamental weaknesses in the current system.
> (DfEE, 1999, p. 5)

Again in 2003, despite a decade of government directed change, performance is still castigated as inadequate. A discussion paper on quality in the sector refers to "deep-seated problems of inconsistency of standards .... (and) poor and coasting providers" (LSC, 2003, p. 1). Despite all the measure to hold colleges to account, including requiring approval for strategic plans, linking funding to outcomes, publishing inspection reports and performance against indicators, the sector is still depicted as often failing its learners.

The thrust of legislation related to further education colleges in the UK reflects trends in other parts of the world; the introduction of site based management, the shift to a summative inspection system, freeing the institution from local community control and substituting market competition. However, in some ways the trend has been pushed further than has been the case with schools. For example, funding is tightly linked not only to student numbers but also to student retention, achievement and to inspection results. Students who leave or who fail to achieve their accredited learning objective fail to attract funds. Poor performing departments may have their funds frozen or cut. Consequently, further education colleges in the UK serve as an interesting case example to examine the effects of the marketisation of education, and of the imposition of accountability measures.

The research

The sector comprises two distinctive types of college, general further education colleges (GFECs) and sixth form colleges (SFCs). GFECs have historically served those young people and adults who undertake vocational education and training to prepare or update for employment. In 1997/8 only 25% of 16 to 18 year olds entering general further education colleges for full time, full year courses had 5 or more GCSE passes at A*-C, the national average for secondary schools being 49% .The second type of college, sixth form colleges, cater largely for 16-19 year olds taking A level programmes and a high percentage go on to higher education. In the same year, 70.8% of 16 to 18 year olds entering SFCs on FEFC funded, full time, full year courses had 5 or more GCSE passes. 23.4% of SFC students on full time, full year courses at SFCs are eligible for widening participation units (additional funding available to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds) compared to 31.5% in GFECs.

Given that both types of college are subject to the same national and local management systems, the same accountability, inspection and funding mechanisms, any similarities or differences in their experience may illuminate the degree to which the mechanisms in

question impact on colleges, or whether the effect is influenced by internal factors such as the nature of the student body or the local education/training market.

In order to explore the experience of sixth form colleges and to compare it with that of other 16-19 education providers, data was collected from sixth form and general further education colleges and from secondary schools by a survey. Questionnaires were sent to the whole population of 105 sixth form colleges (61 responses) and to 1174 secondary schools (489 responses) and 60 general further education colleges (22 responses) in the two regions of England with the highest number and percentage of sixth form colleges as a total of all FEFC funded colleges. Five case study sixth form colleges were then selected, two in the North West, two in the South East, and one in the East Midlands. Statistics held by the FEFC, the Learning and Skills Council (the FEFC as reshaped and renamed from 2001) and the Department for Education and Skills were also analysed to identify patterns in the student profile and achievement of sixth form colleges. The data provided a broad overview of 16-19 providers and a more detailed in-depth view of the individual and collective experience and opinions of staff and students in sixth form colleges.

The aims of government policy

The broad thrust of government policy in incorporating colleges in 1993 was to rescue the sector from perceived "producer capture" (O'Hear, 1991). Prior to 1993, the systems provided little incentive to do more than enrol as many students as possible. Colleges required:

> 'bums on seats' and as many as possible... The fact that you were losing students and had poor retention was no bother really.
> (Burton, 1994, p.399)

Additionally there was a belief that the curriculum reflected teacher predilections rather than student or local business need (Lumby, 1996). As long as colleges continued to recruit a reasonable number of students, whatever the experience of the students, funding would continue to flow in. In reserving an element of the funding per student to be dependant on the student continuing their study and achieving the intended result, colleges were abruptly thrust into the apparent need to ensure students were satisfied with their experience and successful in their studies. The logic of the reforms was that:

- Too few students continued their education post 16
- Too few of those who did stayed the course
- Too few of those who stayed the course achieved their accredited outcome

(Audit Commission, 1993)

The intention of policy change was that colleges must provide an improved experience for students in order to attract and retain sufficient numbers for the colleges to survive financially (FEFC, 1992). The publication of inspection results and of performance

indicators against national benchmarks would further augment this effect by highlighting success and failure to the public and specifically to potential customers.

The logic of the policy seems clear, but policy reform always has unintended as well as intended effects. The data collected indicated that the effects of the same policy were very different in the two different types of college.

The effect on practice

Both GFECs and SFCs were asked how far their colleges had moved along a number of dimensions relating to managerialism (Randle & Brady, 1997). Their responses are indicted in figure 1:

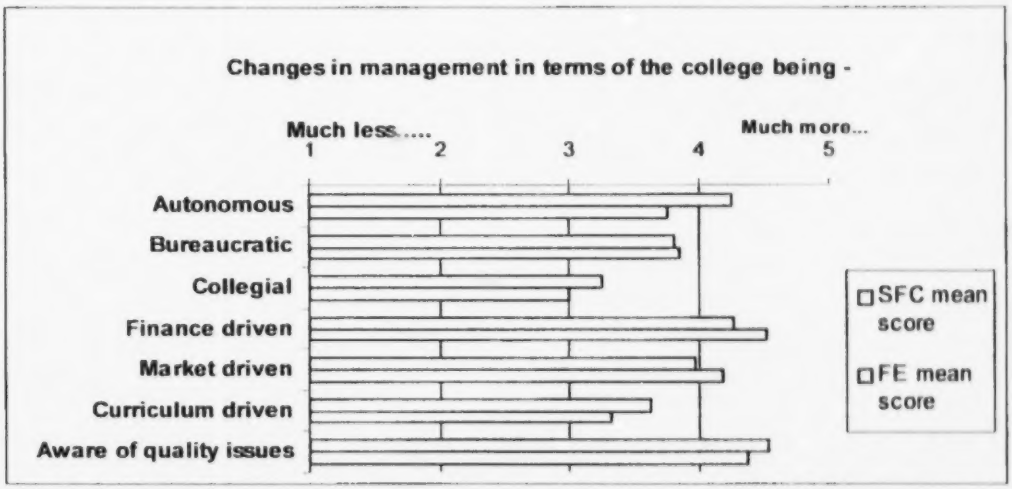

Figure 1 Change in management practice

The indications are that both types of college had become more driven by finance and by the market and were more aware of quality issues, as the policy reform intended. However, the degree of change was less in relation to curriculum issues, where the response of both GFECs and SFCs was close to the point of no change. This result seems to indicate that although finance and the market and quality appeared to have become more significant, this was in some way detached from changes in the curriculum, or to express it another way, the changes were largely divorced from teaching and learning. At the general level there is little difference in change as perceived by the two types of college. However, when the level of management is differentiated a more pronounced contrast between the two types of college appears, as in figure 2:

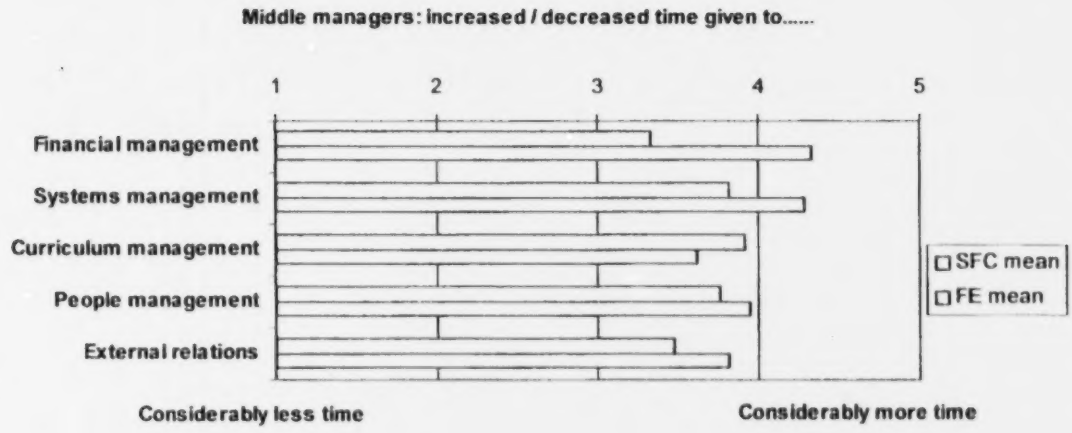

Figure 2 Changes in the management practice of middle managers

'Middle managers' are heads of department, usually in charge of one subject such as mathematics, or a small number of related subjects such as design technology and graphics. The middle managers of SFCs perceived little change in the time they spent in relation to financial management, while those in GFECs clearly felt they were spending considerably more time. The qualitative data from the SFCs confirmed this finding, with middle managers seeing their role as a traditional head of department largely concerned with issues of teaching and learning, and relatively untroubled by pressures of finance. Data from this project and from earlier research (Lumby, 2001) suggests that middle managers in GFECs are very focused on financial issues.

Issues raised by the findings

The literature analysing the impact of policy changes, and specifically the introduction of much tighter accountability demands, has focused primarily on exploring the direct effects, often implying something akin to an engineering metaphor of pressure which when exerted results in strains and perhaps even eventually breakdown at the point of pressure. For example, a national investigation into the practice of colleges in England in Wales resulted in the Kennedy report which was highly critical of the negative impact of policy changes on colleges, leading them "not just to be businesslike but to perform as if they were businesses" (Kennedy, 1997, p. 3). The report assumes a simple cause and effect mechanism, new policy leading to a range of positive and negative effects. This criticism was applied generally to the sector, and avoided considering the implications of the different experience of GFECs and SFCs. The latter have generally not exhibited the ethos which Kennedy found so disquieting, and which has been critiqued widely in relation to the sector in the literature on mangagerialism (Clarke & Newman, 1997; Gleeson & Shain, 1999; Simkins & Lumby, 2002).

This is but one example of analysis of the implementation of policy, and the success or otherwise of the intended outcomes, using a rational approach (House of Commons,

1998). The data from the research on GFECs and SFCs in England suggests that any such approach to the analysis of the effects of policy change is inadequate and that a number of factors internal to each college are also highly influential. Of course the understanding that policy is transmuted though a number of contextual filters and will consequently have different effects in different institutions is not new. The significance lies in exploring what the factors might be and how the impact of these factors in intensifying or modifying the effects of policy results in a focus on teaching and learning or not.

Rather than accepting a simple case of cause and effect - accountability and funding policy change leading to a growing focus on financial and systems issues at the expense of a focus on teaching and learning - the data was used to explore a range of possible hypotheses to account for the different experience of GFECs and SFCs, and therefore the different impact of policy change. For example, did the security of the student market relate to the intensity or otherwise of the degree to which colleges felt driven by finance? Did the student profile, the degree to which students were advantaged or disadvantaged, or their attainment on entry, explain the activity profile of middle and senior managers? Was the size of the organisation a factor, GFECS generally being much larger than SFCs? The results indicated that although all of these factors were likely to exert an influence, none of them were uniform in their effect. An SFC experiencing intense competition, and recruiting students with relatively low attainment on entry could still exhibit a primary focus on teaching and learning which eluded many colleges. Thus, the combination of policy change, including reduced funding and strengthened accountability measures, and an insecure market and a disdavtanged student body were not in themselves decisive in shifting the focus of managers away from teaching and learning and towards financial concerns.

The qualitative data from students and from staff suggested that the practice of the college was shaped by a multitude of factors, including the values of students and staff themselves, and that the degree of impact of policy change could be manipulated, that is intensified or reduced, by strategies including controlling the profile of staff and students, and also by the distribution of leadership and management responsibilities. In GFECs the delegation of responsibility for finance is seen as an appropriate method of ensuring accountability. SFCs tend to retain such concerns at senior management level, retaining the traditional head of department role as focused on teaching and learning. Such thinking runs counter to theory which argues that teaching and learning is best served by control of resource being given to those who are closest to the point of delivery (Thomas & Martin, 1996).

Overall, the data would not support neat hypotheses about cause and effect and it demonstrated both that policy changes intended to bring about improvements in the experience of students had done so, but also that the many unintended negative results were not purely an effect of the policy change but mediated by a range of factors, many of which were in the control of college leaders.

Much of the literature on colleges and on schools has presented staff as victims of an accountability culture, caught in trends which have a global sweep, resulting in inevitable

changes in focus and practice to the detriment of teaching and learning. The data discussed in this paper suggests that policy may have no unavoidable or inevitable effects and that the interplay of a wide number of factors, including the intensions of staff and students, define the ethos and focus of educational organisations. Educators and academics may find it politically convenient to locate the major responsibility for what is perceived as negative change with national policy reform (Lumby, 2003). Internal factors within colleges are likely to be at least as influential in shaping the experience of staff and of students.

This paper has only had space to present a snapshot of the data and its implications. However, some of the conclusions which may be drawn challenge practices which have been suggested as improving the leadership and management of colleges and the student experience. In contradiction to emerging theory on the efficacy of distributed leadership (Spillane et al, 2001) and to much of the criticism of the effects of imposed accountability and funding strictures on public sector management, the following hypotheses are suggested:

- Traditional hierarchical structures of management result in a tight focus on teaching and learning
- Distributed resource management does not result in a better experience of learning
- The decision on how far to retain or change the profile of students and of staff may be the single most influential factor in shaping the focus and nature of teaching and learning.

Much further research is needed on the interplay of culture, practice and policy before these hypotheses as suggested by this research could be shown to be valid. The research reported here certainly suggests the need for caution in interpreting the effects of changes in policy at national or regional level and in attributing any negative effects caused by a perceived accountability culture.

Acknowledgements

Thank are due to Ann Briggs, Michael Wilson, Derek Glover, Tony Pell and Jan Simpson for their contribution to the research on sixth form colleges and to the Nuffield Foundation for supporting the project.

References

Audit Commission and the Office for Standards in Education (1993) *Unfinished Business: Full-time Educational Courses for 16 - 19 year Olds*, London, HMSO.

Burton, S. (1994) Factors affecting quality in the new FE – principals' views, *Coombe Lodge Report*, Vol. 24, No. 5, pp. 349 - 439.

Clarke, J and Newman, J. (1997) *The Managerial State*, Sage.

DES (1991) *Education and Training for the 21st Century*, London, HMSO.

DfEE (1999) *Leaning to Succeed, Learning and Skills Council Prospectus*, London, DfEE.

Edwards, R. (1993) Multi-skilling the Flexible Workforce in Post-Compulsory Education and Training, *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, Vol. 17, No. 1, Spring, pp. 44-51.

Employment Department Group (1993) *Labour Market Needs and Further Education*, London, HMSO.

Further Education Funding Council (1992) *Funding Learning*, Coventry, FEFC.

Gleeson, D. and Shain, F. (1999) Managing ambiguity: between markets and managerialism – a case study of "middle" managers in further education, *The Sociological Review*, Vol. 47, No. 3, pp. 461-490.

House of Commons (1998) *House of Commons Select Committee on Education and Employment, Sixth Report 'Further Education' 2 Volumes*, London, HMSO.

Kennedy, H. (1997) *Learning Works: Widening Participation in Further Education*, Coventry, FEFC.

LSC (2002) Student numbers at colleges in the further education sector and external institutions in England in 2001/02
http://www.dfes.gov.uk/statistics/ accessed 18.2.03

LSC (2003) *Raising Standards: The LSC's Quality Improvement Strategy. An Occasional LSC Discussion Paper*, Coventry, LSC.

Lumby, J. (2003) The uses of research in the learning and skills sector, in Anderson, L. & Bennett, N. (Eds) *Evidence Informed Policy and Practice in Educational Leadership and Management : Applications and Controversies*, London, Paul Chapman.

Lumby, J. (2001) *Managing Further Education Colleges: Learning Enterprise*, London, Paul Chapman.

Lumby, J. (1996) Curriculum Change in Further Education, *The Vocational Aspect of Education*, Vol. 48, No. 4, pp. 333 - 348.

O'Hear, A. (1991) *Education and democracy: against the educational establishment*, London, Claridge Press

Randle, K. & Brady, N. (1997) Managerialism and Professionalism in the Cinderella Service, *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, Vol. 49, No. 1, pp. 121 – 139.

Simkins, T. & Lumby, J. (2002) Cultural Transformation in Further Education? Mapping the debate, *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, Vol. 7, No. 1. pp 9-25.

Spillane, J., Halverson, R. & Diamond, J. (2001) Investigating School Leadership and Practice: A Distributed Perspective, Re*search News and Comments*, April, 2001, pp. 23-27.

Thomas, H. & Martin, J. (1996) Managing Resources for School Improvement, London, Routledge.

Young, M. (1993) A curriculum for the 21st century? Towards a new basis for overcoming the academic/vocational division, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 3, Autumn, pp. 203-222.

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

REPRODUCTION RELEASE

(Specific Document)

I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: Accountability in further education: the impact of UK government policy
Author(s): Jacky Lumby
Corporate Source: / Publication Date: 24/04/03

II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, *Resources in Education* (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following three options and sign at the bottom of the page.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 1 documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

Level 1

☒

Check here for Level 1 release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche or other ERIC archival media (e.g., electronic) and paper copy.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2A documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE, AND IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR ERIC COLLECTION SUBSCRIBERS ONLY, HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2A

Level 2A

☐

Check here for Level 2A release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche and in electronic media for ERIC archival collection subscribers only.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2B documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2B

Level 2B

☐

Check here for Level 2B release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche only.

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits.
If permission to reproduce is granted, but no box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce and disseminate this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche or electronic media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries.

Sign here, → please

Signature:	Printed Name/Position/Title: Jacky Lumby, Professor	
Organization/Address: International Institute for Educational Leadership, University of Lincoln, Brayford Pool, Lincoln, LN6 7TS	Telephone: 01522 886190	FAX: 01522 88023
	E-Mail Address: jlumby@lincoln.ac.uk	Date: 1.10.03

III. DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY INFORMATION (FROM NON-ERIC SOURCE):

If permission to reproduce is not granted to ERIC, or, if you wish ERIC to cite the availability of the document from another source, please provide the following information regarding the availability of the document. (ERIC will not announce a document unless it is publicly available, and a dependable source can be specified. Contributors should also be aware that ERIC selection criteria are significantly more stringent for documents that cannot be made available through EDRS.)

Publisher/Distributor:
Address:
Price:

IV. REFERRAL OF ERIC TO COPYRIGHT/REPRODUCTION RIGHTS HOLDER:

If the right to grant this reproduction release is held by someone other than the addressee, please provide the appropriate name and address:

Name:
Address:

V. WHERE TO SEND THIS FORM:

Send this form to the following ERIC Clearinghouse:

However, if solicited by the ERIC Facility, or if making an unsolicited contribution to ERIC, return this form (and the document being contributed) to:

ERIC Processing and Reference Facility
4483-A Forbes Boulevard
Lanham, Maryland 20706

Telephone: 301-552-4200
Toll Free: 800-799-3742
FAX: 301-552-4700
e-mail: info@ericfac.piccard.csc.com
WWW: http://ericfacility.org

EFF-088 (Rev. 2/2003)

TM034984

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

REPRODUCTION RELEASE
(Specific Document)

I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: Accountability in Further Education: the impact of UK government policy

Author(s): Jacky Lumby

Corporate Source: Publication Date: 24/04/03

II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, Resources in Education (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic/optical media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS) or other ERIC vendors. Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following options and sign the release below.

✓ Check here for Level 1 Release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche and other ERIC archival media (e.g. electronic) and paper copy.

or

___ Check here for Level 2A release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche and in electronic media for ERIC archival collection subscribers only.

or

___ Check here for Level 2B release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche only.

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits. If permission to reproduce is granted, but neither box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

Sign Here, Please J Lumby 21.5.03

I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche or electronic media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries.

Signature: Position: